BRITISH
COLUMBIA

Speech from the Throne

The Honourable Garde B. Gardom
Lieutenant-Governor
at the Opening of the
First Session, Thirty-Seventh Parliament
of the
Province of British Columbia
June 19, 2001

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members of the Legislature

It is my pleasure to address you on the opening of the First Session of the Thirty-Seventh Parliament of British Columbia.

I am pleased to welcome many new members to the Legislature. British Columbians have elected a new government to serve them and lead their Province. I want to express my appreciation to returning and new members as you take up your duties, which as always will challenge and reward you as you serve the public. Our citizens are entitled to your best, and I am confident you will all meet their expectations.

My government has made many commitments to British Columbians. It has said that over its term it will restore business confidence in British Columbia and attract new investment; improve our education system; protect the environment; and make the processes of government more open, responsive and accountable. It has committed to an aggressive ninety-day agenda of change.

No commitment, however, represents a greater challenge than the improvement of health care.

Like other provinces and indeed other countries, British Columbia faces the need to provide better patient care to meet the requirements of our growing and aging population. Properly targeted resources, a long-term health-care plan, improved public health services, and better community and mental health care are all part of my government's agenda.

These issues, and more, will be addressed in future legislative sessions.

There is, however, a more urgent health-care issue facing British Columbians and my government. A long labour relations dispute between the Nurses Bargaining Association and the Health Employers Association of BC has brought British Columbia's health-care system to a point of crisis. Patients requiring immediate care cannot get beds, and their treatment is deferred. An accumulating backlog of people requiring care will burden the system for many months to come. In recent weeks, another dispute between the employers and the Health Sciences Association threatens additional delays, and more backlogs.

My government recognizes the issues that have led to this situation, and believes they must be addressed. All British Columbians, including those who work in the health-care system, want and

demand a successful system, but the underlying problems that have built up over many years cannot be addressed in weeks, or even months. A joint effort — requiring the best of my government, our public servants, the health authorities, health professionals, and health-care unions — will be required. Our citizens demand nothing less.

In the short term, however, my government must address the immediate problem. Sending seriously ill patients to hospitals in Washington, while necessary, serves only those in critical need. British Columbians want to see a full restoration of health services now.

My government intends to act decisively, and will present legislation in this session to restore health services. In doing so, it will provide time for the health unions and employers to explore solutions to the most pressing issues that are preventing agreement. My government regards the protection of services that are essential to the well-being of the people of British Columbia as a primary obligation. British Columbians know there is a need for action. My government believes that the calm of reason will allow us to move forward caring for patients while supporting health-care professionals, and that most British Columbians will understand the need for this action.

I leave you to the important business of this session, confident that you will fulfill the heavy responsibilities to British Columbians the electorate has placed on you.